

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Racer Named Conservation Winner

Wright County, Iowa--Randall "Randy" Burt, 52, of Rowan, is known locally for racing school buses and semi- tractor trucks at northern Iowa race tracks. But this part-time racer and full-time farmer is also recognized as a conservation leader in Wright County. Along with his uncle, John Burt, he was recently honored for their conservation stewardship by the Conservation Districts of Iowa; the best in thirteen Iowa counties.

They were a 2007 regional winner of the landlord/tenant division of the Iowa Soil Conservation Awards Program.

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist Connie Roys says the nominated farm use conservation practices to address every resource concern. Roys said, "On their 357-acre farm they have installed 15 acres of waterways, two acres of terraces, five acres of tree plantings and windbreaks, 40 acres of wildlife habitat, 30 acres of wetlands, 127 acres of contouring and 316 acres is in conservation tillage. The Burts have done a great job of conservation and deserve to be recognized."

Randy Burt says the tradition of conservation on Burt land really started in 1984 as a way to eliminate gullies. "The 1982, '83 and '84 years were all excessively wet," said Burt, "and we had a lot of thunderstorms. There were no erosion checks at all on that farm. In the fall of 1984 I remember gully erosion really causing problems. I was combing the corn and I had the header as high as it would go. When then drive tires got into the gully the header touched the ground. That was not good. At the time I



Randy Burt

told my dad we had to do something or we will end up with a disaster on our hands."

That "something" started with narrow based terraces. Randy, his father, Don, who died in 1997, and Uncle John, rented a bulldozer and followed the design terrace designed laid out by the then Soil Conservation Service. "The terraces pretty much eliminated gullies," said Randy Burt. "Dad and I liked what we saw and we wanted to do more on the ground that needed it."

That led to the family installing other soil saving and wildlife habitat practices on Burt land.

"I love farming and I love the land," said Randy Burt. "They don't make any more land so you need to take care of it. I see-

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places in road ditches that are full of soil that have washing in from farm fields. The county comes and cleans them out to make drive-ways and to fill old railroad cuts. Personally, I'd like to see them haul the soil back to the field that it came from, but it doesn't work that way. Rather than contribute to filling road ditches with soil it's best to keep it in place."

Connie Roys says keeping the soil in place is one of the things that the Burts do best on their land. "Awards are one thing, but the real proof of that came last spring," said Roys. "After a 6-inch rain there wasn't anything that moved. That soil stayed in place where it can grow crops."

Growing crops, racing school buses and conserving soil are things Randy Burt likes to do. Those that know say he's very good at doing all of them.

On the Side

Wright County is in the north central Iowa Prairie Pothole region of the state. The land in the county is normally gently rolling with a 2 percent slope. According to Roys, there are portions of the county where soil erosion is a serious problem. She cites areas of the county where the slopes are 7 to 9 percent and quite long. Roys said, "Long slope lengths add to storm water runoff speed and volume which can necessitate a combination of practices to keep soil in place such as terraces, grassed waterways, no-till and farming on the contour."

*By Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist
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NRCS District Conservationist Connie Roys stands on a grassed waterway with a terrace in the distance. The combination of terraces, grassed waterway and woods are designed to help slow the amount and speed of storm water runoff and keep soil in place on the Burt family farm. The trees form a windbreak that offers habitat to wild birds and animals and also helps protect a nearby farm house.